837 588 548 [586] Free Marriage. The only marriage which can be called free, since it is accepted by both parties, is that of a woman who is unable to endure her first husband and leaves her village with the intention of becoming a prostitute. Divorce is quite rare because the Moaga does not readily agree to it. As she passes through a village, she asks for hospitality, and the news soon spreads that a "free" woman is staying at such-and-such a place. The young men hasten to her and seek to win her favors. Gifts are sent to her, and her hostess is used as go-between. Nine times out of ten, the woman accepts the candidate preferred by her hostess. After some questions concerning his origins and circumstances, one of the young men is accepted as a temporary lover. His comrades come to his aid, and for a few days there is a veritable festival in the village. There is a slight change in the [177] regular fare, since meat is added to the mush; chickens, raised with considerable difficulty, are used for this special treat. This semblance of marriage is thus celebrated. As has been pointed out, however, there has been no divorce, and the deserted husband soon learns the whereabouts of his wife. As soon as he finds out what village she is in -- it may be 100 kilometers away -- he promptly sets out, carrying in a sheepskin enough ground millet for the journey and 500 to 1,000 cowries. He also carries a rooster which, along with the shells, will be offered to the chief of the canton where the lover lives, to whom he will make his claim.

[578] Unions of this sort give rise to three-quarters of the quarrels with which the canton or province chiefs have to deal. A young Moaga who desires peace of mind never regularizes the situation by a so-called marriage even though he may not be able to resist the temptation to harbor the woman for a few days. In any event the affair is easily broken off since sooner or later the woman, eager for change, will want a new lover.

583 Thus, it may be said that although forced marriage has the disadvantage of having a girl marry without her consent, still it also has advantages and a degree of security because the woman, fearing [178] her parents' wrath, rarely leaves her husband. Furthermore, this type of marriage is vastly preferable from the standpoint of peace

583 to the sort of concubinage that "free marriage" is, as practiced in Mossi country.

The Situation of the Betrothed Couple during the Engagement

584 Generally speaking, the fiancé is supposed to avoid his betrothed before marriage. They treat each other with a kind of shy reserve.

Aside from the gifts made to the village elders and some cowries given to the future in-laws at the time of his first visit, no further demands are made on the fiancé.

584 694 The young man is formally forbidden to carry on an intrigue with a woman in the girl's village. If he does so, not only may the engagement be broken, but the lover may never again set foot in the village on paid of death.

Breaking the Engagement

584 When an engagement is broken, the gifts received need not be returned. On the other hand, the death of the girl is not regarded as breaking the engagement; the family must, sooner or later, offer another daughter to the young man to replace the girl who died.

An engagement may be broken [179] automatically in case of adultery, discussed below, or in the event of a quarrel between the two families.

Marriage Between First Cousins

587 Marriage between first cousins is not allowed. There can be no valid union between the children of a brother and sister, between a man and the daughter of either his father's or his mother's brother.

588 587 751 However, it sometimes happens -- inadvertently -- that a girl who has been given in marriage in a very distant village may find that her husband is a descendant of a great-grandparent (material or paternal) in the same family as her own. Had this been known, the marriage would not have taken place. Ordinarily, distant relationship is not discovered until long after the marriage, after complicated genealogical research. In that case, one of the pair, usually the wife,

588 582 751 wears a bracelet made of copper and iron intertwined, kalembanga, which is believed to protect the wearer against any disaster due to the technically illegal marriage. The kalembanga is also believed to protect the children born of the union from sudden death.

Polygyny

595 Polygyny is the rule throughout Mossi country. It is true that the number of wives varies with the resources and position of the individual. Mere heads of compounds who are somewhat well off may have [180] from five to eight wives and numerous fiancées. The [584] latter are usually reserved for the dakompa (older sons and younger brothers of the head of the family), assuming that these men will in turn render real service and be completely devoted to the head of the household.

There are many reasons for the practice of polygyny, but the main one is procreation. The under-nourished natives must rely on [553] the mother's milk to feed their babies and must therefore wait two [534] or even three years before resuming sexual relations with a wife who is a nursing mother. Therefore, they prefer to have several wives.

Consummation

585 When the young girl is taken to her husband, she is entrusted to a woman whom she will henceforth treat as "mother."

A few days after the departure of the cortege, whose composition we shall describe presently, the man claims his fiancée. She is taken at night to the nuptial hut, which has no special features, and no one is present at the consummation of the marriage. In this respect the Mossi differ from the Bambara, who have a griot or an old woman accompany the couple to help the young man, if necessary, overcome the girl's resistance.

It goes without saying that if the girl is found to be a virgin, the [181] husband is overjoyed. If she is not a virgin, the love which he may have felt for her before possessing her is much diminished. The man shows the girl his anger, certain that she will at least tell her mother about it.

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1. Pogotoenga, or rather Pogotoéga, means "woman of the baobab," and comes from pogo, meaning "woman," and toéga, meaning "baobab" /a species of tree/. One may wonder what relation there is between this name and the fact that Pogotoenga was dedicated to virginity, if one ignores the customs of the Sudanese. A woman dedicated
●568 to a baobab (a powerful vegetal divinity) is considered the spouse of the baobab. Therefore, she cannot enter into marriage with a man, which means forced celibacy. It is true that certain Blacks (for instance, the Dialonké of the Faranah circle, French Guinea) consider that a woman married to a spirit owes him only her spirit or spiritual form, and that her material body is free. From this arises the fact that with those Blacks, and some others as well, women-fetishes, women married to spirits or divinities, are actually prostitutes and practice
[786] prostitution. They are, besides, very rare. In short, they are allowed to prostitute themselves but not to marry. It is sacred prostitution, well known to the whole of oriental and Greco-Roman antiquity. Thus, virginity (sacred), on the one hand, and prostitution (sacred), on the other, are rather strangely derived from the same order of ideas.

173 her birth as being a stranger to her sex, and he had her given masculine clothes.

"Pogotoenga developed quickly. At the age of ten, she reached a degree of incomparable beauty, and at about the same period, torn by the ardors of puberty, she succeeded--despite the strict vigilance of the old man, anxious to remain faithful to his oath--in fleeing the paternal household.

Although pursued for a long time, she managed to evade all /8/ attempts at capturing her, until the day when, wandering in what is